

**MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
2015-2016 ANNUAL PLAN WITH RESPECT TO
THE ACCESSIBILITY FOR MANITOBANS ACT**

Introduction

The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA) represents a significant achievement in realizing our vision for an accessible Manitoba. As required by the AMA, this Annual Plan outlines the activities that our Government will undertake in 2015-2016 to advance its responsibilities under Manitoba's accessibility legislation.

The primary responsibilities of the Minister responsible for the AMA are threefold:

- raising awareness of how people are disabled by barriers and promoting the removal and prevention of those barriers;
- overseeing the development and implementation of accessibility standards and facilitating their integration into the activities of individuals and organizations; and,
- ensuring that individuals and organizations affected by accessibility standards are consulted in their development and are aware of their responsibilities.

Many Manitobans face barriers to full inclusion at some point in their lives. Nearly one in six Manitobans has a disability, and this number is expected to rise due, in part, to an aging population. Realizing our goal for an accessible Manitoba is key to improving the health, independence and well-being of persons disabled by barriers. Improved accessibility is also vital to building vibrant and sustainable communities for all Manitobans.

While the rights of persons with disabilities are enshrined in Manitoba's Human Rights Code, the path to achieving accessibility may be challenging. The AMA complements the Code by providing a clear and proactive process for the prevention and removal of barriers to full participation in our society by all of Manitoba's citizens.

The Role of the Accessibility Advisory Council

The Accessibility Advisory Council continues to play an invaluable role in our collaborative efforts to improve accessibility throughout Manitoba. Established in legislation, the Accessibility Advisory Council advises and makes recommendations to the Minister responsible for the AMA related to:

- priorities for the establishment of accessibility standards, their content and implementation timelines;
- activities of government to improve accessibility; and,
- long-term accessibility objectives for Manitoba.

In 2015-2016, the Advisory Council will continue to serve as the central agency in the development of accessibility standards for Manitoba.

The Role of the Disabilities Issues Office (DIO)

The DIO is the administrative arm of the AMA. DIO staff provides on-going support in fulfilling our vision for a fully accessible Manitoba, where all abilities are valued, diversity and independence are celebrated, barriers are removed and human rights are protected. The DIO acts as secretary to the Accessibility Advisory Council and its committees. In addition, the DIO develops resources and tools to promote the AMA and to educate the sectors obligated to comply with Manitoba's accessibility legislation.

Government of Manitoba's 2015-2016 Annual Plan under *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA)*

The 2015-2016 Annual Plan under the AMA targets six strategic priorities:

1. Development and Implementation of Standards, including Consultation;
2. Government Leadership;
3. Resource Development;
4. Training;
5. Public Awareness; and,
6. Development of Compliance Measures.

Strategic Priority 1: Development and implementation of standards, including consultation

Accessibility standards are the building blocks of real, measurable and effective change. The standards establish clear requirements for organizations that have a responsibility to eliminate barriers under the AMA. The AMA commits government to develop accessibility standards in the areas of customer service, employment, transportation, information and communication, and the built environment.

Accessibility Standard for Customer Service

Following the enactment of the AMA in December 2013, the Accessibility Advisory Council (the Council) was given the mandate to develop Manitoba's first accessibility standard in the area of customer service. Feedback from public and stakeholder consultations was integrated into the Council's report that made recommendations to government for a made-in-Manitoba customer service standard.

The Proposed Accessibility Standard for Customer Service is based on the Council's recommendations. For 60 days, from March 12 through to May 11, the proposed standard was posted for public comment on the Disabilities Issues Office (DIO) website at www.gov.mb.ca/dio. The Council is reviewing responses and considering recommendations to Government for further amendments before the standard is presented to Cabinet for approval. Manitoba is committed to establishing the Customer Service Accessibility Standard as a regulation in 2015.

Accessibility Standard for Employment

Work has already begun on developing an accessibility standard in the area of employment. The development of an accessible employment standard will assist people with disabilities to secure and retain employment. By pro-actively removing barriers, employers can help create workplaces that allow employees to reach their full potential, whether they were born with a disability or are facing new barriers.

The labour force participation rate of persons disabled by employment barriers continues to be much lower than that of the rest of the population. Unemployment among persons with disabilities in the labour market is nearly double that of persons without disabilities. By eliminating barriers and creating equal opportunity for gainful employment by all Manitobans, benefits are experienced not only by job seekers disabled by barriers, but by society as a whole. Socio-economic benefits include increased incomes and well-being, increased tax revenues and a reduced need for publicly funded income supports.

The Accessibility Advisory Council has been asked to guide Manitoba's development of an employment accessibility standard. The Council will establish an Accessible Employment Standard Development Committee and develop the terms of reference to guide their work. The committee will include persons with disabilities, government representatives, and members of the private sector with expertise in the area of employment.

The Committee will distribute a discussion paper and hold public consultations to inform recommendations to Government for the creation of an accessibility standard for employment. A discussion paper that will serve as the basis for public consultations will be completed no later than March 31, 2016.

Strategic Priority 2: Government Leadership

The Government of Manitoba has a responsibility to deliver programs and services in a fully accessible manner. By demonstrating leadership for accessibility, we will encourage all public sector bodies such as schools, health authorities, and municipalities, as well as private and non-profit organizations to comply with the standards established under Manitoba's Accessibility Legislation.

In 2015-2016, the Disabilities Issues Office will continue to work hard in supporting all of government in realizing the vision for a barrier-free public service. Across departments, disability access coordinators work collaboratively to ensure that persons with disabilities benefit from equal access to government services. The DIO will work with these coordinators to review how service delivery and training tools can be improved to reduce accessibility barriers in the delivery of government services and programs. The DIO will also work with all other public sector bodies to ensure that accessibility is integrated into all publicly funded institutions.

Accessibility Plans

The AMA recognizes the leadership role of the government in achieving accessibility by requiring that public sector bodies create an Accessibility Plan. The Government of Manitoba and large public sector bodies with significant interaction with the public are required to create Accessibility Plans by 2016. These include government departments, crown corporations, regional health organizations, colleges and school divisions and cities of more than 10,000. Smaller public sector bodies and government agencies have an additional year, to 2017, to create their Accessibility Plans. Staggering implementation among the approximately 500 public sector bodies affected will allow greater opportunity to support implementation.

Manitoba's accessibility legislation requires that Accessibility Plans created by public sector bodies (including the Government of Manitoba) be made in consultation with persons disabled by barriers or representatives from organizations of persons disabled by barriers. The plans must incorporate the following:

- A report on the measures taken to identify, prevent and remove barriers that disable people;
- Measures that will be taken in the period covered by the plan to identify, prevent and remove barriers; and,
- Measures that are in place to assess the effect on accessibility for persons disabled by barriers when new policies, activities or initiatives are undertaken.

Accessibility Plans developed by publicly funded organizations, including government, must be reviewed and renewed every two years.

Although much progress has been made in creating an accessible public sector, these Accessibility Plans will help to identify systemic barriers. They will also lay the framework for developing policies and identifying forward-thinking actions to prevent and remove barriers that disable Manitobans.

Strategic Priority 3: Resource Development

Early in 2015-2016, the Province will launch a guide on how to create Accessibility Plans as required under the AMA. This guide will be complemented by templates, resources and other tools to assist government departments and all other public sector organizations to develop their Accessibility Plans. This guide will lay the foundation for an on-going, proactive approach to identify systemic barriers in the operations of government and provincially funded organizations.

The DIO will also expand its web presence to facilitate access to information about the AMA. The aim is to create a user-friendly, accessible repository of information and resources to support the AMA and accessibility in Manitoba.

Strategic Priority 4: Training

Every year, Manitoba celebrates Manitoba Access Awareness Week (MAAW) during the first week of June to raise awareness and to celebrate the significant contributions of Manitobans with disabilities. This year, MAAW will focus on accessibility legislation.

The DIO will collaborate with our community partners to organize a disability awareness training event for public sector organizations on June 3, 2015. Participants will learn more about the AMA and about practical ways to remove and prevent barriers in their organizations. They will also become familiar with local accessibility services and disability organizations. In addition, participants will receive tips on how to prepare and implement their organization's Accessibility Plan.

Strategic Priority 5: Public Awareness

Public awareness is critical to the successful implementation of accessibility legislation. Introductory brochures, public presentations, promotional materials, and an expanded web presence are all elements of plans for an AMA public awareness toolbox. In 2015-2016, the DIO will also approach potential partners in the public and private sectors to explore joint efforts at a broader public awareness campaign about the AMA.

Throughout the year, we will work in partnership with affected organizations to create awareness about accessibility legislation. Together, we will raise awareness about the AMA and the benefits of accessibility for all citizens.

Strategic Priority 6: Development of Compliance Measures

The government will focus its efforts to promote compliance with the Customer Service Standard on the development of education and resource tools that will facilitate compliance. However, should an organization choose not to comply, the AMA provides for mechanisms such as compliance orders and the issuing of penalties.

In 2015-2016, the DIO will undertake an environment scan of existing provincial inspection and enforcement regimes to determine how these can assist in ensuring compliance with the AMA. The result will be an overview of options for incorporating inspection related to the AMA into existing inspection mandates. Further, the scan will help identify organizations that must comply with the AMA that are currently not subject to inspection of any kind. This important preliminary work will assist the Province in developing a more comprehensive regulatory regime in 2016.

In Closing

Government and public sector organizations will lead the way in implementing the AMA; however, this legislation offers opportunities for all Manitoba organizations, businesses and individuals who are affected by disability personally or through friends and family. Improved accessibility will attract new customers within the private sector and offer new possibilities for job seekers with disabilities. Now is the right time to take steps to

improve accessibility for clients and customers affected by barriers, as well as for employees with disabilities

Improving accessibility is not only the right thing to do; it's the smart thing to do. For businesses, making products and services more accessible can increase their client base. Attracting and keeping skilled employees, including people with disabilities, is important to our economic success. Promoting Manitoba as an accessible destination can increase tourism. Making Manitoba more accessible ultimately benefits everyone.

Building accessibility is a long-term goal. All Manitobans are invited to contribute to our efforts by learning more about accessibility and building on our successes, year after year. Please join us in making progress toward our goal of a fully accessible Manitoba, where everyone can work, learn and play in a barrier-free society.